



**Remarks of Langdon D. Neal, Chairman
Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago
October 19, 2012**

Ladies and Gentlemen of the City Council, I am proud to be able to report to you today that the electoral franchise in Chicago is sound and breaking new ground in technology and services for our voters. With me today are: Executive Director Lance Gough; Assistant Executive Director Kelly Bateman; Legal Counsel James M. Scanlon; Communications Director Jim Allen; Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Peter Peso; Finance Director Frank Bouelle; and two people the City Council staff know very well, Executive Assistants Yvonne Jones and Kathy Ross.

I thank you for having us here today to answer questions about the budget for the coming year.

The Chicago Election Board is managing the latest in a series of the most historic elections in our 126-year history. The Board is seeing strong voter interest and enthusiasm, just as we did in 2008.

There have been a number of remarkable trends:

- The Board has seen a last-minute rush of voter registrations, with more than 75,000 new registrations and name-and-address changes in the final month ahead of the Oct. 9 registration deadline.

- For the group of voters I call the “true procrastinators,” the Board is seeing signs that our Grace Period program voter registrations, which continue through Nov. 3, will exceed our 2008 numbers. The Grace Period is the safety-net program for those who failed to register by the standard registration deadline of Oct. 9.
- The Board expects Early Voting numbers comparable to 2008. Our lawmakers expanded the final week so that the Board can offer Early Voting through the Saturday before the election. That change made sense for voters – just as it also made budgetary sense to scale back the first week of Early Voting, when traffic is typically much lower.
- This year, the Chicago Election Board was among the select few election authorities in the nation to pursue and obtain funding through the Federal Voting Assistance Program to make it easier for the men and women in our Armed Forces to access and cast their ballots. Thanks to this program, the Board has a new on-line ballot marking system. Military and overseas voters used it before the March Primary. In this election, the Board is receiving very positive feedback about how this system is so easy to use.
- The Chicago Election Board became the first election authority in Illinois to offer a system that allowed people to launch the voter-registration process from a smart phone, laptop or tablet device – without a printer. With this system, the Board printed and mailed the form to the voter to sign and return. The Board is pleased to report that more than 3,000 people registered this way this past month.
- Our voter rolls have approximately 1.33 million active registrations. These are the cleanest voter rolls in Chicago history. The Board has better standards for canvassing, and the Board has access to a newer statewide system that helps find and eliminate duplicate registrations. The Board also has been a leader in accessing a statewide death-certificate database and new files from the U.S. Postal Service to eliminate outdated records.

- The Board will have more than 3,000 high school and college students staffing our polling places and working as technicians to solve any equipment problems in this election. The Board far and away leads the nation in this regard, and the success of these programs stands as my greatest source of pride.
- Lastly, we're bracing for a very strong voter turnout during Early Voting and on Election Day. Earlier this week, we received reports from site managers that hundreds of voters were showing up to inquire whether Early Voting had begun.

The Board still has much work to do. We know that November 6th will be a long night. We are fairly confident that we will once again have more than 90% of our precincts counted and reported long before the 10 o'clock news.

One critical area of our work has involved the re-mapping process for all legislative boundaries, including the Wards and Precincts in the City of Chicago. Thanks to the many steps we took over the last several months, and thanks to the help many members of the City Council have provided and continue to provide, we believe voters by and large will not be negatively impacted by the changes to the ward and precincts. These changes, were the result of the decennial census and mandatory re-drawing of ward and precinct lines.

As all of us in this room know, the City Council this year enacted a new ward map and this summer passed minor technical amendments. Thanks to the assistance of Chairman Austin, Alderman O'Connor and many others in this room, we were able to re-align the city's precincts for this election.

This was vital to help us work toward structural cost reductions and to plan to be able to make adjustments, as needed, ahead of 2014 and 2015.

Re-drawing every precinct in Chicago is a monumental task. And this year, the Board was able to adjust the map to reflect how more voters are using Early Voting and Absentee Voting. We now have 2,034 precincts this fall, compared to 2,570 in 2010.

This helps contain election costs on several fronts, by reducing the numbers of:

- Pieces of voting equipment to program and test;
- Election supply carriers to load and transport;
- Election day workers to hire and train; and
- Polling places to rent.

I am very pleased to report that thanks to this consolidation and our work with people in this room and many public and private partners, for the first time, more than 80% of our polling places in the City of Chicago will be fully accessible to those with various physical challenges. Our goal is 100%, and we are making progress.

As with any precinct alignment, the Board will be re-visiting this issue in 2013 to see if we might adjust the lines ahead of the 2014 and 2015 election cycles. The Board has already identified certain precincts in a number of wards where there may be changes. But it was important to take this step now, rather than try to adopt the lines in the 2014 election cycle – which would have left virtually no time to adjust before the 2015 Municipal Election.

For the November 6 Presidential General Election, the Board has implemented a variety of measures to make certain that our voters are aware of the changes and where they can cast their ballots.

The first step came in August, when the Board mailed out canvass notices to every voter. That notice detailed the new ward and precinct for each voter's address.

This week, the Board mailed out notices to 1 million voter households with information on their Election Day polling place and the Early Voting site in that ward.

Voters also may access their information on our web site at www.chicagoelections.com.

Voters can call us at 312-269-7900.

But the Board took an important step – becoming among the first in the nation to utilize one of the most accessible types of technology for so many of our voters.

We created a text-message system for people to find their polling places. The voters send the simplified street version of their street address to 312-361-8846. In a minute or two, our web site will send a message back to that voter with the Nov. 6 polling place for that address. Chicago was the first jurisdiction in Illinois to offer voters this effective and inexpensive innovation.

We have been busy in recent weeks sharing information on this new text system with our partners at 311 City Services, the Chicago Public Library System and the Chicago Public Schools. We will continue to market it through the news media.

Looking beyond this year, for Fiscal Year 2013, the Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago has a recommended budget from the City of \$8,722,360.

This sum marks a significant decrease from the prior year, but more importantly, a major reduction from four years ago.

Because our election calendars run in a four-year cycle, the best comparison for FY2013 is to FY2009.

The proposed FY2013 budget of \$8,722,360 represents a decrease of \$1,182,896 from the FY2009 expenditures of \$9,905,256. Over that four-year period, that represents a reduction of 12% overall, or an average of 3% per year.

The Board is pleased to report that we are achieving this reduction, in spite of the expenses and special projects we will need to complete in the coming year.

Calendar Year 2013 will mark the start of the season that includes:

- Re-mapping the County Commissioner Districts
- Completing a full canvass mailing to all voters
- Candidate petition circulation for 2014
- Candidate filings for 2014
- Objection hearings and judicial appeals for 2014
- Election judge and Early Voting preparations for the March 2014 Primary

In the coming year, the Board also will be examining the possible implementation of more cost-effective, transparent and reliable scanning equipment. If we were to move forward with a change, this would require significant testing, state certification and programming changes for Election Judge training ahead of 2014. However, we believe a possible upgrade could be cost effective by allowing for reductions in costs for ballot printing and more flexible ballot designs.

As registration deadlines, such as the Grace Period program, and Early Voting are moving closer to Election Day, the Board also must examine the possible implementation of electronic poll books in our precincts. Electronic poll books would not only provide for real-time updates in the polling places, but also provide judges with an easy-to-use resource to answer any question – including direct voters who may be in the wrong precinct to the correct location to cast their ballots.

We also are pleased to achieve these savings, in spite of the fact that the newer equipment is the Board purchased under the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) is much more costly to operate, and in 2013, HAVA funding to offset those higher expenses is not available. In FY2009, the Chicago Election Board was still receiving financial support through HAVA to offset some of the higher costs related to using the newer voting equipment.

In comparing the FY2009 Board appropriation to the FY2013 request, the following variances are noted and explained:

Personnel Services include decreases of \$1,418,869 or 18% over a four-year period. This reflects ongoing efforts to reduce full-time staff. In the last decade, the Board's headcount will have dropped from 158 to 119 full-time positions, a 25% reduction.

Account #0130 (Postage) includes a decrease of \$217,802 or 82% over a four-year period.

Account #0143 (Court Reporting) and Account #0145 (Legal Services) include decreases of \$26,330 or 76% and \$57,292 or 19%, respectively, over the four-year period.

Account #0149 (Purchase of License, Maintenance and Software) includes an increase of \$35,000 or 234% over a four-year period. This increase reflects ongoing software needs for the Election Central systems that are used to track all incoming calls and responses on Election Day.

Account #0150 (Publication) includes a decrease of 100%.

Account #0190 (Telephone Centrex) includes a decrease of \$177,146 or 51% over a four-year period. This reduction reflects successful efforts to work with the Budget Office to take advantage of the City's buying power by aligning our phone billing under an existing contract.

Account #0155 (Rental of Property) includes an increase from \$3,000 in FY2009 to \$500,616 in FY2013. As you are aware from similar changes in other agency's budgets, this reflects an accounting shift to more accurately reflect the property management services the Board obtains through the Department of General Services.

Additionally, FY 2013 will be used as a year for the Election Board's computer staff to gain more thorough control of the programming and maintenance needs of the Dominion Voting Systems software and hardware.

In preparing this budget, the Board has paid close attention to the City's need to conserve its financial resources. At the same time, the Board must follow state and federal mandates by the legislative, judicial and executive branches to administer transparent, impartial and accurate election systems that fulfill the needs of the citizens of the City of Chicago.

In closing, I want to emphasize something very important. We at the Chicago Election Board are very fortunate to enjoy a strong cooperative spirit with not only the City Council, but also the leaders of so many public agencies: our public schools, our police department, 311 City Services, General Services, the Chicago Public Library, the Chicago Park District and a variety of other agencies. These agencies and more are critical to our success in securing accessible spaces for Early Voting and Election Day. Over the years, we have had the pleasure of honoring both public and private organizations who have provided our electoral service with "exceptional service." Invariably, the honorees include Commissioners and Department Heads from various City agencies. They are one and all key to our success in holding down costs and steadily working to achieve more for Chicago's voters.

With that, I look forward to answering your questions.